

THERE IS HOPE FOR THE REPENTANT SINNER

Today's Text: Isaiah Chaps 1-3

Extracts:

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured by the sword”; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken [Is. 1: 18-20]

Eugene de Kock was a police commander during the apartheid (white supremacist) era in South Africa. He was such a notorious killer that he was nicknamed “Prime Evil.” In 1996, he was jailed for more than 200 years after he had been found guilty of 89 crimes, including murder and torture. With the fall of apartheid, the new multiracial government set up the Truth Commission that was mandated to pardon politically motivated offenders who confessed to their crimes. Eugene came forward and confessed to more than 100 crimes, including killing five ANC (African National Congress) activists in Swaziland and seven members of a South African family in Botswana. He was pardoned!¹

When Eugene hired lawyers to defend himself against 89 crimes, he lost and was sentenced to more than 200 years in jail. However, when he put himself at the mercy of the state and confessed to more than 100 crimes, he was pardoned! What does that tell us about our relationship with God? When we refuse to acknowledge and confess our sins and seek God's pardon, we face His judgment. Since nothing defiled can enter His kingdom, we can NEVER be acquitted. That is why He has sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place and grant us the privilege of a pardon. Can you afford to refuse such an irresistible offer?

In today's lesson, based on the first three chapters of the book of Isaiah, we shall demonstrate that there is hope for you, no matter how irredeemable your circumstances may seem.

¹ “Apartheid assassin pardoned for killings,” 2 June 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/774777.stm>

1. From indelible red to impeccable white!

Let us go to the Passion Week as recorded in the Bible. On one side was Jesus Christ who was about to be crucified. On the other side were three men: Barabbas, Judas Iscariot and Peter.

Having found Jesus innocent of the charges brought against Him by the Jewish council, the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, was desirous to set Him free. However, His accusers blackmailed him to give up on that course by reminding him, “If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar” [**Jn 19: 12**]. One of the tricks that he had tried out was to propose to set Jesus free in the place of Barabbas. Barabbas had organized insurrection against the Roman Empire in which Roman soldiers were killed. He was arrested and detained, pending trial [**Lk 23: 19**]. Of course, the outcome was sure. He would be sentenced to death by crucifixion, the method reserved for non-Roman citizens. The people did not buy the Governor’s plan. Instead, they shouted, “Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas” [**v. 18**]. So, the man who had committed rebellion and murder was pardoned *without trial!* His record was wiped clean. Jesus the innocent One died in his place.

Barabbas is a figure of Adam and his descendants. Just as the death of Jesus on the cross gave Barabbas unmerited release and pardon, and “much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many,” so has the free gift come to us all, “resulting in justification of life” [**Rom. 5:15, 18**]. The blood of Jesus has atoned for our sins and when the Father sees His blood covering us, He forgives us our sins. Our indelible red becomes impeccable white!

However, that grace depends on our response. Peter and Judas were both the apostles of Jesus Christ. Both of them occupied privileged positions in His earthly ministry, just as modern day believers also claim. Peter was the presumptive head of the group to whom Jesus had proposed to give the keys of His kingdom [**Matt. 16: 18-19**]. Judas was the treasurer that Jesus had entrusted with His funds [**Jn 12: 6**]. In Jesus Christ’s week of trial, both of them betrayed Him.

It was Judas that betrayed Jesus to the Jewish leaders who wanted Him dead. As soon as he realized that he had done wrong, he “was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’” Thereafter, he went and hanged himself [**Matt. 27: 3-5**]. In other words, Judas refused to forgive himself! Compare that with Peter’s situation. After he had denied knowing Jesus three times, “he went out and wept bitterly” [**Lk 22: 62**]. He did not commit suicide or resign himself to eternal condemnation. He remained with the rest of the apostles and played a prominent role in the post-resurrection activities. In fact, when an angel announced the resurrection of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, he sent her to “go tell His disciples – and Peter- that He is going before you into Galilee” [**Mk 16: 7**]. Why did the

angel specifically mention Peter's name? It was to let him know that God had accepted his repentance, that though his denial of Jesus had turned his soul into indelible red, his repentance and faith in Jesus had now made it impeccably white!

Those are the two choices that we face as sinners. Are you ready to confess your sins and receive God's pardon or do you find it difficult or impossible to admit your guilt and confess it?

2. Why people hide their sins [i.e., refuse to confess them]

Here are some of the reasons:

a) *The scale of justice may favour me!*

Some of us are under the impression that God keeps a record of good and bad deeds, and that on the day of their death, He will simply balance the books! If their good deeds exceed the bad, then, they would make heaven! This position is unbiblical because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" [**Rom. 3: 23**], and "whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all" [**Jam. 2: 10**]. Before God, our righteousness is as "filthy rags" [**Is. 64: 6**]. How then can you know what is good or bad in the eyes of God?

Every evil deed is like a stab wound on the soul. Like a wound on the human body, it can heal with time but the scar remains. Nothing defiled can enter the kingdom of God! Therefore, only the blood of Jesus can remove those scars and make the soul brand new again. That was the experience of the thief crucified on the right side of Jesus. He had been a thief all his life. By the scale of justice rule, his bad deeds clearly exceeded his good and hell would be his logical destination. Then, a few hours to his death, he encountered Jesus. He repented for his evil past and accepted Jesus as his personal Lord and Saviour when he said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Assuredly, I say to you, *today you will be with Me in Paradise*" [**Lk 23: 39-43**].

b) *We may have a false sense of security!*

We may be under the illusion that we have time, being still young or still showing evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit (such as prophesying or speaking in tongues), or that we are occupying privileged positions and that nobody would find out. For example, Samson did not repent from his promiscuity because he could still take out fortified gates after sleeping with prostitutes [**Judg. 16: 1-3**]. Pride did not allow Nebuchadnezzar to heed God's warning through Daniel until he had been humiliated with seven years of living like animals [**Dan. 4: 19-37**]. The people of Judah

refused to repent because they preferred the false prophesy of Hananiah to the true message of Jeremiah [**Jer. 28: 1-17**].

Many of us have been trapped by popular culture or economic or political privileges to accept the truth of God and repent. In Trinidad, for example, some Christians have reverted to Hinduism or *Sango* worship² because they have been made to believe that that is how to become authentic Indians or Africans respectively! In Moslem societies, fear of death or excommunication can make people refuse to confess Jesus and thereby remain in sin even when the lie in their current practices becomes glaring. In the Bible, the parents of the man born blind that was healed by Jesus could not accept Him “because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed that He was Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue” [**Jn 9:22**].

The word of God through Isaiah says, “the day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up- and it shall be brought low” [**Is. 2: 12**]. Therefore, a false sense of security cannot guaranty any safe haven for you and “be sure your sin will find you out” [**Num. 32: 23**].

c) *God is patient and He understands!*

God is in deed patient with sinners because a day and a thousand years are one and the same with Him, and He “is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” [**2 Pet. 3: 8-9**]. We continue in sin, thinking that God will ultimately let us get away with it!

This tendency is well demonstrated by king Ahab of Israel [**See 1 Kgs Chaps 20-21**]. Here was the wicked king who married Jezebel that made the idol worship of Baal the national religion. Even when God punished Israel with three-and-a-half years of drought and famine, Ahab remained an evil man. In His infinite mercy, God gave victories to Ahab against the Syrians. Did that make Ahab repentant? Not at all! Instead, he killed a poor man, Naboth, under false allegations and seized his inheritance that was adjacent to his palace. When God sent Elijah to warn him of the punishment for his grievous acts, he repented and God was ready to forgive him [**1 Kgs 21: 17-29**]. But he did not change! He planned an unprovoked attack on Gilead, following a false promise of victory from 400 prophets into whose mouths God had allowed a lying spirit to speak a lie. He went to that war and was killed, unrepentant and unsung [**1 Kgs 22: 1-28**].

² Sango is the Yoruba (Nigeria) god of thunder.

The lesson we learn from that story is that we should not stretch God's patience too far. Yes, Christ died for us while we were yet sinners but according to an African proverb, what is ours is not necessarily mine! America is a rich country but there are many poor Americans. If we are not available for God's purpose, He will use those who are ready. When Saul disobeyed, God raised David to take his place as king of Israel.

3. Happily God is merciful!

Like Barabbas, Christ's atoning blood has set us free. That grace is available to us. What we do with it is our choice. We can be like Judas Iscariot, believe that our sins are too great to be forgiven and go commit spiritual suicide by being unrepentant or backslidden. Alternatively, we can be like Peter, accept and confess our sins and obtain God's unconditional pardon.

God has made us a wonderful promise through prophet Isaiah when He says [**Is. 1: 18**]:

"Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord, "though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool."

I find it remarkable that God wants us to reason together with Him. That suggests a personal *relationship*. How can you relate to the One that you do not even know, being a Spirit? Happily, even when "no one has seen God at any time," we rest in the comfort that "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" [**Jn 1: 18**]. To know God is to accept Jesus that His Father has given the full authority to judge the world [**Jn 5: 22**]. To know Jesus is to receive the "bleaching detergent" (His blood) that can turn indelible red items into pure white (the righteousness of God). There is no other way out!

Let us pay attention to the following points that God wants us to ponder over:

- I. Why have you rebelled against God after He has nourished and brought you up as His children [**Is. 1: 2**]? What have you done with the blessings that He has poured on you? Are you into wine and worldliness now that you have a free hand of material resources [**vv. 21, 22**]? Do you now look down on the less privileged or less successful [**vv. 15-17**]? Do you pay *correct* tithes on your earnings? Have you paid all the vows that you made when you were in your desperate hour of need? The Lord warns, "I will turn My hand against you, and thoroughly purge away your dross, and take away all your alloy" [**vv. 25, 26**]. Can you imagine what it means to lose God's blessings and return to a worse situation than ever before?
- II. Stop covering up your sins with outward religion [**Is. 1: 10-15**]! When you refuse to get right with God, He is not interested in your frequent attendance at different church services or superlative offerings or outward

show of piety. God says, “They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood” [vv. 14, 15, 16].

- III. The key to walking right with God comes from following His word [Is. 2: 1-3], not in being politically correct through following the ways and current trends of the world [vv. 6-9]. To do the latter is to be drawn into idolatry [v. 8] and raise wayward children and base people who are rude to the honourable [Is. 3: 5]. Humble yourself because “the day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty” [Is. 2: 12].
- IV. Finally, the Lord sends Isaiah to “say to the righteous that it shall be well with them, for they shall eat the fruit of their doings” [Is. 3: 10]. The righteous is the person of faith [Rom. 4: 1-5], faith in Jesus Christ [Rom. 10: 9-10].

4. Conclusion

Barabbas was pardoned but he did not become a follower of Jesus. He might have gone back into rebellion and thereby put himself outside of God’s pardon through Jesus. Every citizen of a country is entitled to the national passport but it is not every citizen who owns or carries one. You have to still apply for it! In like manner, Jesus has died for all of human kind but you have to make a personal move to benefit from it. Like the thief on the cross, you have to accept Him by faith in your heart and confess with your mouth His atoning death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. Then, He will introduce you to His Father as His brother or sister. Then, you will be able to draw on the detergent of His blood to wash your sin-stained soul and make it as white as snow. Thereafter, each time you sin and confess it, God will forgive you and make you as wool.

There is hope for the repentant sinner.